

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 008376

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SUBJECT: MDA/THIRD PROTOCOL: SWISS READOUT ON FOREIGN

MINISTER CALMY-REY VISIT TO EGYPT

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The Swiss Embassy provided post with a readout of the October 28-29 visit to Egypt by Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey for consultations on the Third Protocol/Emblem issue. During her short stay, Calmy-Rey met with First Lady Suzanne Mubarak and Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit. Aboul Gheit reportedly committed to pressing his Palestinian counterpart Nasser al Kidwah in private to cooperate on Swiss efforts, but is not prepared to lean on other Arab governments. Aboul Gheit cautioned against presenting Arab governments with a "fait accompli" regarding the emblem issue at the December diplomatic conference. First Lady Suzanne Mubarak communicated a lack of personal involvement on the emblem issue, and cited various regional conflicts to suggest that the time was not right to move forward on the conference proposal. Nevertheless, the Swiss intend to send invitations to the conference in the coming days and believe Syria needs to be consulted with directly beforehand. End summary.

12. (C) Our Swiss Embassy colleagues provided a readout October 30 of Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey's meetings in Cairo the previous day. Calmy-Rey reviewed with FM Aboul Gheit Swiss consultations on the subject of a diplomatic conference in December and discussed recent conciliatory statements by Israel's Magen David Adom (MDA) Chairman Yifrach. Calmy-Rey shared with Aboul Gheit an October 28 letter from the MDA Chair to his Palestinian counterpart calling for additional bilateral cooperation between the two societies. Aboul Gheit acknowledged the positive statements from the MDA, but cited additional (unspecified) steps that remained to be taken by Israel. Aboul Gheit - aware that the MDA is "out in front" of the GOI on this issue - urged the Swiss to ensure that Israel "does not put any obstacles in the way of cooperation between the MDA and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society." Aboul Gheit cited Palestinian Foreign Minister al Kidwah as the key to progress on the issue, and committed to speaking with him on the subject. Aboul Gheit said he was not prepared to promote the issue with other Arab governments, but would "support" the Swiss efforts in his private consultations with al-Kidwah. Aboul Gheit requested that the Swiss diplomatic conference not present the Arabs with a "fait accompli" on the emblem issue ("an additional short period can't hurt, as this issue has been on the table for a long time" -- Aboul Gheit reportedly said).

14. (C) Aboul Gheit also was interested in whether Calmy-Rey would visit Syria for consultations. The Swiss Minister responded that she had decided to postpone her travel as the Syrians were not yet prepared to discuss the issue. Swiss Special Envoy Ambassador Pfirter offered to travel to Damascus but had also deferred since the Syrians had so far refused to engage in discussion with the MDA. Our Swiss Embassy colleagues believe it necessary for Calmy-Rey or another Swiss envoy to travel to Syria ahead of the December diplomatic conference given the issue of MDA presence in the Golan.

15. (C) During her meeting with Calmy-Rey, Egyptian First Lady Suzanne Mubarak offered a downbeat assessment of the regional political environment, suggesting that current pressures on Syria, tensions with Tehran, and the recent uptick in violence between Israel and the Palestinians, militated against moving forward now to resolve the emblem issue. Echoing OIC positions, the First Lady suggested that the time was not right for moving forward on the emblem issue, as Arabs could not be seen making "concessions" to Israel while so many conflicts were raging.

16. (U) Press coverage of the visit was limited. According to a report in the Gumhuriyya newspaper, Aboul Gheit stressed the importance of avoiding hasty decisions on the matter. Our Swiss Embassy colleagues shared a small piece from the French edition of Al Ahram, however, in which Calmy-Rey's visit is mentioned and FM Aboul Gheit is said to have counseled "not rushing" on the conference proposal so as to "preserve the unity of the Movement," and to "maintain the high principles in the interest of the Palestinian territories."

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